

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer-implemented method, comprising:  
at a client computer, obtaining information about  
available updates from a server;  
5 storing the information about available updates at a  
local cache on the client computer; and  
in response to a request for update information that may  
be available at the server, accessing the local cache to  
retrieve the information about available updates.

10 2. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein  
downloading information includes accessing at least one  
Internet website.

15 3. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein  
obtaining information about available updates from a server  
includes obtaining data that changes the information about  
available updates in the local cache.

20 4. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein  
storing the information about available updates includes  
storing data identifying whether a hardware device has a  
driver therefor available for download from an online site.

5. The computer-implemented method of claim 4 wherein at least some of the data identifying whether the driver is available for download is maintained in a bitmask.

5 6. The computer-implemented method of claim 5 wherein the bitmask has a bit therein that indicates whether the driver may be available for download from an online site.

7. The computer-implemented method of claim 6 wherein  
10 the bit is determined by hashing an identifier corresponding to the hardware device.

8. The computer-implemented method of claim 6 wherein a  
15 setting of the bit indicates whether a file containing update information can be locally accessed.

9. The computer-implemented method of claim 8 wherein  
the bit setting indicates that the file can be locally  
accessed, and further comprising, accessing the file, and  
20 searching for data therein corresponding to the hardware device.

10. The computer-implemented method of claim 8 wherein the data corresponding to the hardware device is present and

indicates a version number of an available driver for that hardware device.

11. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein  
5 storing the information about available updates includes  
storing data identifying whether at least one software  
component is available for download from an online site.

12. The computer-implemented method of claim 11 wherein  
10 at least one software component is available, and further  
comprising storing data identifying whether installation of at  
least one available software component is dependent on  
installation of at least one other software component.

13. The computer-implemented method of claim 11 wherein  
15 at least one software component is available, and further  
comprising storing data identifying a version for at least one  
available software component.

20 14. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein  
accessing the local cache to retrieve the information about  
available updates indicates that an update is available, and  
further comprising, persisting information about the available  
update.

15. The computer-implemented method of claim 14 further comprising, downloading updates at a time when a connection exists based on the information persisted about the available  
5 update.

16. The computer-implemented method of claim 1 wherein accessing the local cache to retrieve the information about available updates indicates that an update is available, and  
10 further comprising, downloading the available update.

17. In a computing device, a system comprising,  
network access software configured to access a network;  
a cache;  
15 a cache maintenance mechanism connected to the network access software and configured to maintain information in the cache corresponding to available updates maintained on the network; and

automatic update software connected to access the cache  
20 in response to a request for update information on the network, and to determine from the information in the cache whether an update is available.

18. The system of claim 17 wherein the cache maintenance mechanism maintains information in the cache by downloading information into the cache from a network site.

5 19. The system of claim 17 wherein the request for update information corresponds to a scheduled event.

10 20. The system of claim 17 wherein the automatic update software locates information about an update to a driver in response to a request for hardware-related updates.

15 21. The system of claim 20 wherein the information about the update to the driver is included in a bitmask in the cache.

22. The system of claim 20 wherein the information about an online update to the driver is included in a file in the cache.

20 23. The system of claim 17 wherein the information in the cache further includes driver includes version information for at least some of the available updates.

24. The system of claim 17 wherein the automatic update software determines whether at least one software component is available for download from the network.

5        25. The system of claim 17 wherein the automatic update software determines that an update is available and persists information corresponding thereto.

10       26. The system of claim 17 wherein the automatic update software determines that an update is available and downloads the update from the network.

15       27. A computer-readable medium having computer executable instructions, comprising,  
      accessing an online source to obtain information related to available updates;  
      caching the information;  
      receiving a request directed to whether a particular update is available for download from the online source; and  
20        accessing the cache to determine whether the particular update is available for download from the online source.

28. The computer-readable medium of claim 27 wherein the online source is accessed via an Internet site.

29. The computer-readable medium of claim 27 wherein the cache indicates that the particular update is available, and further comprising, downloading the update.

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30. The computer-readable medium of claim 27 wherein the cache indicates that the particular update is available, and further comprising, persisting information corresponding to the update for later download of the update.

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31. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon a data structure, comprising:

a first data field representative of a hardware identifier;

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a second data field representative of a version of a driver corresponding to that hardware identifier; and

a third data field representative of a name of the driver.

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32. The data structure of claim 31 further comprising another data structure including a plurality of data units, wherein one of the units indicates that the first data structure exists.

33. The data structure of claim 32 wherein each data unit of the other data structure is determined by performing a hash of the hardware identifier maintained in the first data field.

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34. The data structure of claim 32 wherein the other data structure comprises a bitmask, each unit being represented by a bit in the bitmask.

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